

11 September 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: The Crucial Underestimates

1. As I tried to show in my article for Studies, a complete check of the accuracy of NIE's would be so complicated as to be incomprehensible, and moreover would be inconclusive and misleading. We have not consistently underestimated the Soviets. But there have been underestimates in recent years which were conspicuous, and I presume it is mainly these that the President has in his mind. Probably you ought to be aware of them.

2. They had to do with the total number of operational ICBM launchers the Soviets would have five years or more after the date the estimate was written. These underestimates began in 1963, after the initial overestimates of the "missile gap" period, and after satellite photography had solved most of the problems of a current count. (Incidentally, it took a few years for us to make even two-year projections correctly, and in the earlier years of under-estimates for the long period there were over-estimates for the two-year period.)

TOTAL OPERATIONAL SOVIET ICBM LAUNCHERS

	<u>1967</u>	<u>1968</u>	<u>1969</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>Ten-year force goal</u>
<u>Actual number</u>	570	806	1028-1038	1258-1318	
<u>Estimate in NIE</u>					
11-8-62	300-600	--	--	--	
11-8-63	--	--	400-700	--	
11-8-64	--	360-475	410-590	410-700	
11-8-65	--	--	--	500-800	500-1000
11-8-66	--	--	946-1038	--	800-1200
11-8-67	--	--	--	--	1000-1500
11-8-68	--	--	--	--	1100-1500

3. There were, to be sure, various reasons for these under-estimates. There are also various refinements, qualifications, categorizations, and so on which make the picture look somewhat better than this chart suggests. (Note particularly a continuing estimate that within some 10 years the 220 older launchers would be phased out.) But the crude numerical account stands as above.

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